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SUBJECT: CONGOLESE BISHOPS WEIGH IN ON ELECTORAL PROCESS

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¶1. (U) Following a week-long conference from February 27-March 4, the Congolese National Episcopal Conference (CENCO) -- an influential political actor in the DRC -- issued a statement from the country's Catholic bishops on the state of political events in the DRC. In its message, CENCO deplored the mismanagement of the country's economy and resources, exhorted political parties to abstain from violence during the elections process, and urged the Congolese people to elect new leaders of high moral character committed to good governance.

¶2. (U) The first half of CENCO's declaration focused on security, political and social issues in the DRC. CENCO's permanent committee notably expressed its concern over the "exacerbation of ethnic cleavages" in the country with the resurgence of parties based on national identity. The bishops deplored the verbal attacks underway between political leaders, which they characterized as a true menace to peace. The CENCO message blamed the country's political class for mismanagement of the country's economy and social network, saying that the DRC faced one of the "most serious humanitarian crises since the Second World War." The message noted the country was composed of two economic classes: one which lived in opulence, and the other which lives in poverty and has to make do with empty promises.

¶3. (U) CENCO called on the Congolese people to elect a new generation of political leadership. According to the CENCO statement, the DRC will only succeed if the people elected leaders who love their country, promote good governance, and are of high moral character. The message went on to state that the DRC needs leaders who want the development of peace, justice and national unity.

¶4. (U) CENCO made several recommendations to the country's governing class, political actors and the international community to ensure the sound management of the electoral process. CENCO appealed to the DRC's political parties to abstain from all forms of violence -- verbal and physical -- towards their political adversaries, and to respect the country's political code of conduct. In a thinly-veiled reference to the current debate over the fate of Olivier Kamitatu and the presidency of the National Assembly (reftel), CENCO called on political leaders to "abstain from destabilizing the institutions of the Republic because of internal political party affairs."

¶5. (U) CENCO urged the Independent Electoral Commission to establish a workable electoral calendar within the framework and timetables of the DRC's constitution. It called on the international community not to impose its own choice of

political leaders on the DRC, but rather to support the people's choices. Moreover, CENCO appealed for the continued assistance of the international community and MONUC to provide for security throughout the country during the course of the elections.

¶6. (U) In closing, CENCO called on the Congolese people to avoid supporting politicians based solely on their regional or ethnic identities, noting that choices made on that basis would result in the return of dictatorship in the DRC. In addition, CENCO urged all Congolese, including Church officials, to participate in the civic education campaign before elections this year.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: By issuing a "yellow card," to all political players, CENCO's message -- which will be widely distributed throughout the country -- puts potential spoilers on notice that attempts to derail the transition will not be tolerated. Pronouncements from CENCO in the past have had significant impact, and it is likely this message will as well. Furthermore, the statement was fortuitously timed, as it comes after a week of political confusion regarding the presidency of the National Assembly. CENCO has now made its position perfectly clear: the transitional government (and elections) should not be dragged down by internal party politics. End comment.
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